

The residents age but never graduate.
The wives push baby carriages full of books.
The men carry their notes in lunchpails.

On summer afternoons the old folk gather
on park benches to sweat the final,
and Saturday morning a group forms
at the gas station to read disorganized essays.

Naturally I have forgotten their names
but the boy who always had his hand up
is an alderman and owns the haberdashery.

The girl who ducked assignments hangs out
by the drugstore, chain-smoking, a pink
comb in her back pocket.

All the creative writing students live
in a meadow of wild flowers and practice the lute.
Wherever they go, they make a big circle.

I, of course, am the mayor
and occupy the big colonial at Main and Oak.
Now and then someone knocks on the door
with a term paper that is fifteen years late
or a question about Yeats or double-spacing.

But usually they just walk past in silence
or tiptoe sometimes up to a window to watch me
bent over in a dim batch of lamplight
correcting everything they have ever done.

-- Billy Collins

Scarsdale NY

POETRY BROKER

a young man of considerable promise
has recently gotten into the racket
of appropriating to himself
the scheduling of poetry readings.

he does not understand
that poetry seldom co-exists
with power.